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United for Quality Care

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Janet Williams, PCA  
Stamford  
District 1199 New England  
Before the Appropriations Committee

Good Evening Senator Osten, Representative Walker and members of the Committee, my name is Janet Williams and I am a Personal Care Attendant (PCA) living in Stamford. I am testifying before the committee today to ask that you fund home care services so that PCAs can make livable wages and receive quality benefits.

I have worked as a PCA for 12 years and truly love this work. On a typical day I will help my consumer bathe, provide meals, transport them to doctors appointments, help consumers take medication, help them pay, generally keep their surroundings clean, and much more. It is so fulfilling to be able to build a relationship with the consumer I care for, and to know I am helping them live a more comfortable life. I can honestly say I have built friendships with many of my consumers that I will cherish forever.

While this work is certainly fulfilling, it can also be very challenging. PCAs are professional caregivers and this work is demanding on your body and mind. I am usually exhausted leaving my shifts which wouldn't be as tough if we were paid a living wage and received benefits.

Instead PCAs are expected to get by on poverty wages and no benefits. Every PCA I know struggles financially. We do not earn enough money to save anything, and are constantly forced to choose between paying our bills or putting food on the table. That is no way to live. In addition to low wages, there are other issues such as the fact that we don't get paid time off, we don't get sick time, we don't have mileage reimbursement, we don't have a 401(k), and we don't have health insurance. We are the working poor and without livable wages and these benefits we will remain in poverty.

For many of us we are one crisis away from financial ruin. For me that crisis happened last September when I unexpectedly fell ill. I spent a month in the hospital before being sent to rehab. I was told I have a spinal infection that left me in a wheelchair unable to walk, and that I must attend extensive physical therapy. There is no benefit whatsoever for somebody like me in this situation. I am fortunate I have my family to take care of me or else I would be doomed.

Is this how heroes are supposed to live? Last year I was called essential, but I feel expendable and I am not alone. Please do what is right by PCAs like me by properly funding home care services. PCAs deserve more than endless poverty and struggle.

Thank you for your time.